

Osip Hotinskiy

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Moscow

Russia

Interviewer: Ella Levitskaya

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Osip Hotinskiy is a tall and lean man. His gray hair is cut short.

He has a charming childish smile and a terrific sense of humor.

He was willing to tell me the story of his life.

Osip lives with his daughter Nina and son Nikolay.

His wife died in 2000.

The family lives in an atmosphere of love and understanding.

Osip takes interest in the life of his children and knows their friends and his children treat him with love and great respect.



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- **My family background**

I can say very little about my father's parents. They died long before I was born. My grandfather's name was Isaac [Hotinskiy], but I don't know my grandmother's name. I don't know where and when they were born. They lived in Kiev, though during the tsarist regime Jewish families weren't allowed to reside in Kiev, which was beyond the Jewish Pale of Settlement [1](#). This ban didn't refer to doctors, lawyers, merchants of Guild I and II [2](#) and highly skilled craftsmen. Craftsmen were allowed to settle down in Podol [3](#), a by-river district in Kiev. My grandfather was a tailor and he must have been a skilled master, considering that my father told me that he provided well for his family. My grandmother was a housewife, which was quite common with Jewish women. My grandparents had five children. Lisa was the oldest daughter, Etlia was the second daughter and my father, Yakov, was born after Etlia, in 1892. His Jewish name was Yankl. My father's brother Vladimir - his Jewish name was Velvl - came after my father. And Mirrah was the youngest.

My father didn't tell me about his childhood. I think my father and his brother and sisters received secular education besides the traditional Jewish education that was mandatory in Jewish families. They were well- educated people. I think my father's parents were religious. At least, I remember that my grandmother was said to have been buried in accordance with the Jewish traditions. My father, his brother and sisters knew Yiddish and spoke Russian well.

My father's older sister Lisa married Moisey Verniye, a Jew, and they moved to France in 1912. They lived in Paris. Moisey was a jeweler. Lisa was a housewife. They had two children, both older than me: a son named Sasha and daughter named Jacqueline. Sasha became a well-known film producer. My parents talked little about them, reluctant to mention their relatives abroad [because it was dangerous to keep in touch with relatives abroad] [4](#). USSR nationals might have been subject to conviction for espionage, preparation of a terrorist attack at the order of foreign intelligence, and the person would disappear in the Gulag [5](#). At that time judicial authorities didn't quite care about establishing credible evidence of crime.

An example for this is what happened to my father's sister Etlia Neifeld [nee Hotinskaya]. Her husband was a rather high-ranking state official. In the 1930s he went to Paris on business and his wife accompanied him. Some time after they returned they were arrested. Etlia's husband was executed and she was sent to the Gulag. She was allowed to return to Moscow in 1954 after Stalin's death [in 1953]. Aunt Etlia died in Moscow in the 1980s. She was buried in the town cemetery.

My father's brother Vladimir moved to Moscow in the 1920s. He finished a college and worked in an office. He was married and had a son. During the Great Patriotic War [6](#) Vladimir was at the front. After the war he returned to Moscow and went to work. He died in Moscow in the 1970s. My father's younger sister Mirrah also lived in Moscow. She was married and had two children. Mirrah's family name was Krakovskaya. She died in Moscow in the 1980s. My father's sisters and brother were atheists.

I got more information about our French relatives in the early 1990s, when my daughter Nina happened to visit France. My aunt's daughter Jacqueline told Nina a lot about her family. When Lisa and her husband decided to emigrate, my grandmother asked her to take her father's tallit with them. Lisa was young and was an atheist, following the spirit of the time, and she refused to take the tallit. Lisa had a white Siberian squirrel fur coat that her husband had given her on the occasion of their engagement. When the lining wore out Lisa decided to replace it. When she took off the old lining she discovered the tallit that grandmother had sewed in underneath. Lisa decided to make a blouse from the nice silk fabric that the tallit was made from. Lisa died, then her older son Sasha died, and his widow moved to Israel with her children. She remarried there. One of Jacqueline's nieces came to visit her. When she heard this story and heard that there were still cuts of the tallit left, she asked her to give her the pieces as a relic. There are still pieces of my grandfather's tallit in Israel.

My father got fond of revolutionary ideas in his youth. He joined the Communist Party in 1910. By the way, he worked with Lazar Kaganovich [7](#), who became one of the leading party activists later, in one of the party units. My father met my future mother in this party unit.

My mother's family lived in the town of Parichi in Belarus, present Gomel region. Grandfather Nisn Schukin and grandmother Elia-Sheva Schukina were born in Parichi. I don't know their dates of

birth or my grandmother's surname. All I know about Parichi is whatever little my mother told me. My grandfather was a fisherman. He caught and sold fish. My grandmother was a housewife. My grandparents had seven children. I don't know my mother's siblings' dates of birth, but I will list them in sequence. My mother's sister Genia was the oldest. Then came two sons: Naum and Shaya. My mother was the fourth. She was born in 1892. At birth mama was named Nehama. This name is also indicated in my birth certificate. Later Mama was called Nina, a Russian name [see common name] [8](#), which was also indicated in her party membership certificate and passport. Maria, Revekka and Hatzkel were born after Mama.

The family was rather poor. Mama told me that when she was a child the local wealthy residents allowed the children to pick fallen apples in their gardens. Then the family sold better looking apples and left the worse looking ones for them to eat. When Mama and her brother Shaya were in their teens, they went to work at the timber felling facility to remove the rind from tree trunks with special tools. The children took on any job to help their parents support the family. Mama became an apprentice to a dressmaker.

My grandmother and grandfather were religious. I think they raised their children to be religious too. However, when the children grew up, they left Parichi for bigger towns where some of them got fond of revolutionary ideas and joined the Party, and none of them remained religious. My mother's older sister Genia moved to the USA in the late 1910s. The family had no contact with her. Naum lived in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine. He was a very good joiner. Naum was married and had a daughter, Genia. During the Great Patriotic War Naum and his family evacuated to Moscow where Naum worked as a joiner at the aircraft factory. After the war they moved back to Dnepropetrovsk. Shaya was a tailor in Moscow. He had three sons. During World War II one of his sons perished at the front, the second one died in the 1980s. The youngest son lives in Moscow. My mother's sister Maria moved to Kharkov. She married an editor. Maria didn't change her surname of Schukina. Maria was a housewife. She had two daughters, Nina and Fira. Nina died recently. Fira lives in Moscow.

My mother's younger brother Hatzkel lived in Moscow. He worked as joiner in the Moscow metro. Hatzkel was married. His daughter's name was Thaisia. Hatzkel was a business oriented and sociable person and went to work as a logistic agent in an office. He often traveled on business. Before the Great Patriotic War he went to Brest to execute contracts. German troops attacked Brest on the first day of the war. There was no more information about Hatzkel. He may have perished on the first day of the war. His daughter Thaisia lives somewhere in Ukraine. My mother's sister Revekka had no family of her own and became like a mother to me. Grandfather Nisn died in Parichi before I was born. My grandmother stayed with her children. She was very hard-working and helped her children about their houses and to take care of their children.

Mama moved to Kiev at the age of 16. She went to work at a tailor's shop in Kiev. She got involved in revolutionary activities, probably under the influence of her friends. In 1910 she joined the Communist Party. She was 18 years old. The tsarist government persecuted revolutionaries. In the early 1910s my father was arrested and exiled to Siberia. Mama told me that she was arrested at the age of 17. The gendarmes came early one morning and ordered her to get dressed and follow them. Mama asked them to wait for her outside and let her get dressed, considering that she was a woman. The gendarmes looked at her nodding their heads: 'Oh yeah, a woman,' but they went outside. Mama was sentenced to six months in prison with regards to her young age. After my

father returned from exile and Mama returned from jail they continued their revolutionary activities. In 1917 the Revolution took place in Russia [see Russian Revolution of 1917] [9](#).

• Growing up

I don't know when or how my parents got married. When I was born they lived in Moscow. I was born in Moscow in December 1919. My parents named me Osip. Since my parents were atheists they didn't arrange any religious ceremonies with regards to my birth. I was a baby when my father was sent to Kharkov in connection with his party activities. This happened during the Civil War [10](#). I cannot remember anything about our life in Kharkov. In 1925 our family moved to Moscow. My parents received an apartment, luxurious for that time, on 2 Clementovskiy Lane in the center of Moscow: actually, they received two adjacent rooms in a five-bedroom shared apartment [see communal apartment] [11](#). There was the family of a colonel living in two other rooms and a single woman living in a little three square-meter room. I have dim memories about my father. He died in 1927. His premature death probably rescued me and Mama from arrests later [during the so-called Great Terror] [12](#).

When I was small, Mama worked in the Central Supervisory Commission. She went to work early in the morning and returned home late at night. At first my grandmother stayed with us taking care of me, but all other children wanted Grandmother to move to them and Mama hired a housemaid. When I was old enough, Mama sent me to the kindergarten. Our housemaid or my grandmother picked me from the kindergarten in the evening. I could hear Mama's voice through my sleep, when she came home late at night. Mama believed that work was beyond everything else, particularly the party work, and I was growing up a self-sufficient child.

Grandmother Elia-Sheva was religious and never failed to observe Jewish traditions, even though her children were atheists. She lit candles on Friday and prayed over them. On Saturday she tried to do no work. She even asked me to turn on the lights in the evening, if there was nobody else at home. However, I made efforts to struggle 'against her religious delusions.' I remember that grandmother always bought matzah before Pesach and kept it in a box under her bed. She didn't eat bread on holidays. I am ashamed to recall this: in my childhood I enjoyed putting some bread into the box and telling my grandma about it, when she thought she was having matzah. My grandmother was so kind that she couldn't even get angry with me, which I would have deserved. She only said, 'Ah, you...' threatening me with her finger.

I started school at the age of eight in 1928. I did well at school and did make much effort for it. I remember the carnivals that Young Octobrists [13](#), and pioneers [see All-Union pioneer organization] [14](#) arranged in the streets on religious holidays. We marched the streets singing 'Away with monks, rabbis and priests! We'll climb the heaven and chase away all gods!' I remember the carnival on Piatnitskaya Street near Clementovskiy Lane where we lived at Christmas. This was called the anti-religious Christmas. There were costumes and I made a carton priest with a censer. I pulled the rope and the priest swayed the censer. There were fireworks and we were carrying banners with anti-religious slogans... Our teacher told us that we were not to eat Easter bread. She finished her speech saying a common phrase: 'There is no God.' I remember the school and the yard. There were many children living in the apartment building. We played and ran around in the yard in our free time.

My mother's younger sister Revekka spent a lot of time with me. She was an 'Old Bolshevik' [15](#) like my mother. It's not that she was old, but this was a common name for those who had joined the Communist Party before the Revolution of 1917. Revekka finished the College of Foreign Trade. She worked at the Trade Representative Office. In 1929 she was sent to work at the Trade Representative Office in Germany. In 1933 Revekka came to Moscow on business and convinced my mother to let me go with her. We spent a couple of months in Copenhagen, Denmark, and then went to Berlin. I went to the Russian school for the children of employees of the Trade Representative Office.

Hitler came to power in Germany, when we arrived there. I remember how surprised I was to see flags with swastikas on each house in Berlin. At home people put flags only on holidays. Later I got to know that people were ordered to have flags on their houses. I remember fighters wearing brown uniforms marching in the streets. All passers-by were to greet them with their arms stretched when they were marching. My school friend was the daughter of an employee of the Trade Representative Office. I don't remember her first name, but her surname was Grishina. Her father didn't greet the marchers once and two of them started beating him. He screamed that he was a foreigner, but it didn't help. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent its protest to the German government, but they didn't reply. Then employees of the Trade Representative Office started going back home. In 1934 my aunt and I returned to Moscow.

Mama was on a long business trip to Uzbekistan. She worked as chief of the machine/tractor yards political department. She was to support cotton harvesting. I was 14 years old and I went to Margelan where Mama was staying. She was a high-ranking official and had a car and a driver who drove her to various districts where she monitored the harvesting processes. At times she was away for several days in a row. I went to a Russian school where I studied the Uzbek language. The Uzbek language was based on the Latin alphabet and in the late 1930s it switched to the Slavonic alphabet. About a year later Mama and I returned to Moscow. I went back to my old school.

This was the period when the arrests [Great Terror] began. 'Enemy of the people' [16](#) became a common definition. Fortunately, my mother and her sister Revekka were not arrested. One summer I went to a pioneer camp, and when I returned Mama told me that our neighbor, the colonel, had been arrested one night. There was a search of his apartment. We never heard about him again. Later my father's brother Vladimir was arrested. He was a rather high-ranking official at the time. Shortly after his arrest Yezhov [17](#) was removed and Beriya [18](#) replaced him. He declared an amnesty, and Vladimir was one of those who were released from jail. My parents' other brothers and sisters were tailors, carpenters and housewives and the authorities took no interest in them. Mama became a party organizer at the dairy factory. She probably wanted to stay away from where she could have been a focus of attention. I don't know.

Many of my schoolmates were children of the party officials who resided in the so-called 'House on the Embankment' in Moscow. I was a Komsomol [19](#) member already. We frequently had meetings where reports of the schoolchildren whose fathers were arrested were discussed. This even became a standard procedure at some point of time. Each student was asked: 'How could you not notice that your father was against the Soviet power?' There was also a common answer: 'I don't believe that my father acted consciously, he was probably drawn into this. Or maybe, it's a mistake...' To give credit to our teachers, none of the children was expelled from school or the Komsomol, but they were reprimanded for relaxing their vigilance. Neither teachers nor children

changed their attitude towards these children. Everybody tried to support and help them while in other schools they were expelled from the Komsomol and the children declared a boycott of the 'son of an enemy of the people.'

It also happened that a student reported that his father was arrested and later that his mother was arrested as well. Once, a terrible incident happened. My schoolmate Zelinskiy's father was arrested. Newspapers published materials about the trial of Zelinskiy and the group of people with him. Zelinskiy confessed that he had arranged train crashes by adding glass bits into grease. Even we, teenagers, understood that this was crap and couldn't be true. We reprimanded Zelinskiy's son like we did the others, when all of a sudden he disappeared. The others continued attending school even if both of their parents were arrested, but he disappeared... This was a fearful time.

I was in love with a girl from my school. Her father had nothing to do with party or business activities, when all of a sudden she told me that her father had been arrested. A couple of months later she came to school shining and informed me that her father was back home. Such occurrences strengthened our faith in the justice of the Party, when a person was arrested as a victim of slander, but then was released when proven not guilty.

There was no anti-Semitism in those years. Though there were many Jews arrested, we never linked their arrest to their national identity. None of my acquaintances, friends or I faced any routinely or state-level anti- Semitism.

I finished school in 1939. I was fond of exact sciences and I entered the Bauman School, present-day Moscow High Technical School. In 1939 a new law on army service was issued. Before this students hadn't been subject to army service before finishing their education, but according to this new law the students were to join the army when they reached the recruitment age. In October all 1st-year students were recruited to the army. I was recruited as a private to a reserve regiment. We were trained to handle a mortar and sent to the Finnish Front [see Soviet-Finnish War] [20](#). I arrived there perhaps one week before the war was over. I was a mortar man and carried an 82-mm mortar and a support slab to it. I think on 12th or 14th March the peace treaty with Finland was signed.

• **My military service**

After the Finnish campaign the Baltic Republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were annexed to the USSR [see Occupation of the Baltic Republics] [21](#). Our division was sent to support the annexation of Estonia in 1940. I cannot describe the attitude of the local population to this. We didn't meet with the locals. We approached the Estonian border, turned our mortars in their direction and thought that we would have to fight with them, when the order 'As you were!' was given.

The area near the border of Estonia belonged to the former Pskov region and was populated with Russians. The locals came out to greet us, and when we stayed and were accommodated they asked us questions. We didn't miss a chance to tell them about the advantages of living in the USSR. I asked them whether they could afford to give education to their children and told them about myself. I said that after finishing my two-year army service I would go to college and then become an engineer. They listened, nodding their heads: 'you have a good life there...'

Our military unit was deployed in a forest. We watched movies and arranged dancing parties. A few local girls visited us, but there were rumors that they were local prostitutes. Once a month we received allowances in Estonian currency and our officers rushed to the local stores. Watches were in great demand: to have a watch was a luxury in the USSR. Aunt Revekka bought me a watch when we were in Germany, and my fellow comrades borrowed this watch from me to be photographed. During the war watches were also highly valued and taken off all killed German soldiers.

Later we were ordered to relocate to Belarus, Chermekha station near Brest Litovsk, 30 kilometers from the western border of the USSR. There were earth huts made for us. They were big and made to accommodate a company. There was a deep pit dug, logs on the floor and plank beds on the sides, little windows by the surface. The roof was covered with grass to camouflage it. There were iron stoves to heat the earth huts. In winter soldiers on duty gathered brushwood and wood for the stoves. There were also smaller earth huts for mortars. Mortars were hauled on horse-drawn carts. There were sheds for horses made. We stayed there till 22nd June 1941.

After the defeat of the Germans in Poland and the completion of the Finnish campaign we felt rather optimistic. Stalin and Voroshylov [22](#) convinced us that we would only fight on the enemy's territory and there would be minimal losses. We sang songs like: 'We beat any enemy with minimal losses and with one powerful blow...' We believed this and besides, many didn't believe that Hitler would dare to attack us. When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact [23](#) was signed, everybody believed we shouldn't fear Germany and that the Germans were our friends.

We relocated to construct fortifications on the border with Poland. The Germans were on the opposite side of the river. When Soviet frontier men were passing, they waved their hands in greeting and we responded. We were equipped with the latest automatic guns. There was state of the art weaponry on the border and there were weapon storages along the border.

I was appointed deputy political officer of the mortar company. This was the position of a junior commanding officer, like the first sergeant. The political officer was responsible for officers and I was to work with soldiers. I was to read them newspaper articles, explain and clarify what they were about. I was to conduct classes on 'Improvement of military discipline' and they were scheduled a year ahead.

In May 1941 the political staff of the division was gathered. We were told that these classes were cancelled and we were to conduct four classes about Germany: its roads, population; to cut it short, we were to explain what soldiers might expect to experience in Germany, but nobody explained why we had to do it. I conducted two classes and the soldiers kept asking me: 'Are we going to fight there?' and what could I tell them, when I knew nothing myself? I pretended I was aware of the situation: 'No, comrades! If they attack us, we would go and then ...' Of course, I had the same questions, but the answers that I could think of were not so cheerful ...

There were many undereducated people in our regiment. I studied well at school and liked mathematic. Our regiment commander asked me to help him improve his mathematic preparing for the exam at the Military Technical Academy. I gave him private lessons. Each battalion was to work two to three weeks at the construction of fortifications near the border. On 20th June our battalion was to go there. My commander asked me to stay and continue teaching him. There were three sick soldiers and a few horses left under my command.

- **During the war**

On Sunday 22nd June, at 4am, bombing began. The war had started. The regiment lined up and left and I stayed waiting for my battalion to come back. The regiment commander sent me to the station to help evacuate officers' families. There was a freight train waiting, women and children crying. I helped them to load their luggage and get on the train. When the boarding was over, the commanding officer ordered me to escort the train with the remaining soldiers.

When we were passing Minsk, we could see the German tanks. Our train passed, when their encirclement closed behind us and all those, who had failed to escape, civilians and military, had no more chance to. The Germans captured our military storage facilities with state of the art weaponry and food stocks. I was lucky to have escaped. My lessons of mathematic gave me this opportunity.

On our way the German air forces attacked us. Some women and children perished. We reached Penza where the women and children got off the train. My team and I headed to Moscow. We arrived at the headquarters in Moscow trying to find out the whereabouts of our regiment and division. Nobody could give us any information. We obtained passes to go to the front line headquarters in Smolensk. In Smolensk we joined the front line forces. I was appointed an aide in the regiment headquarters at first and when German troops approached Smolensk, I was sent to the front line.

I remember sitting in a trench with a dozen soldiers waiting for the German tanks to hold them back. We had bottles filled with gasoline corked with cotton wool that we were to spark with a match before throwing it onto a tank. We also had grenades that were rather inefficient in fighting against the tanks. We were sitting there for a long while, when we noticed that German tanks entered Smolensk and were quite behind us. A senior lieutenant passing by ordered us to scarp from there as soon as possible. The retreat was rather messy. Some stupid commander ordered the regiment to retreat in smaller groups considering that Germans had air forces available. Our point of destination was Yartsevo.

My squad of ten headed to Yartsevo via Yelnia. We made our way through the woods, but when thirst and hunger got unbearable, we went to villages begging for water and food. When we approached Yartsevo, we were told that German troops had landed there. If there had been more of us, we would have been able to smash this troop, but just ten of us were helpless. We headed to Yelnia where the 220th division was formed from retreating units. The process was simple. A patrol stopped a bunch of soldiers ordering them to line up, captured another group ordering them to join the line: the soldiers were coming continuously. Then the line was ordered to line up by specialties: machine gunners, flak gunners, mortar gunners, all in separate lines.

Three deputy political officers approached me asking whether I would like to join the intelligence forces. I agreed. They asked whether I was familiar with the 45-mm cannon. I replied that there was an anti-tank cannon near where our regiment was located. I was a tower gunner on an armored truck and deputy political officer of the armored company of the intelligence battalion. In the process of this formation we were not involved in any combat actions. On 2nd October, when German troops started on their advance to Moscow, we had to retreat fighting our way through the encirclement. We quickly ran out of gasoline. Since leaving our armored vehicles and cannons to

the Germans was out of the question we blasted them and moved on. We had rifles and one machine gun at our disposal.

Our intelligence people informed us that the Germans had left a gap in one spot where we could get through. Getting through the encirclement we headed to the gathering point where we were asked where we came from. I was asked whether it was true that I had been in an intelligence company and whether I wished to join an intelligence unit. Of course, I gave my consent. It was according to the procedure that the military had to give their consent to join the intelligence units.

Perhaps, I would have been regimented to the mortar unit had I been asked whether I was a mortar man, but there was no time for consideration: I was asked a question and had to give my reply immediately. So I was assigned to the intelligence unit of the 119th division where I was appointed Komsomol leader of the company and a deputy political officer. Our division was in defense till the general offensive near Moscow. When the offensive began, the intelligence unit was to be on the very front. Germans set villages on fire retreating. They ordered tenants to leave their houses before setting them on fire. Once we captured an incendiary. The village women asked us to give him to them. We did. They grabbed him by his arms and legs and threw him into the burning hut.

The most important objective of intelligence units was to capture prisoners for interrogation. We went scouting wearing our uniform coats and warm uniforms underneath in winter. We had no decorations except a hat with the star. If we came to villages, people first looked whether we had stars, which meant that we belonged to the regular army, and only then did they welcome us. Villagers didn't quite appreciate partisans: they broke into villages demanding makeshift vodka and food. At times they behaved like bandits. We went scouting in groups of a few of us. We waited by the side of a road for German transports to pass by. If it was too numerous and had strong guards, we ignored it, but when there were one or two wagons or sleighs, we jumped up and fired our guns. We left one or two survivors and took them to the headquarters.

Usually the element of surprise worked out and the Germans weren't able to start shooting, but things happened. Once we attacked a transport and started firing, but the Germans fired back. They killed three of our intelligence men. There was another incident. Each of our squad had a vehicle. Once the 3rd squad went on a vehicle and none of them returned. When we started an offensive near Moscow we found them. They had all perished. However, basically we managed to capture a prisoner for interrogation who surrendered without even trying to resist.

Since I had lived in Germany for a year I could speak German all right and was ordered to interrogate the prisoner while he was still in a state of shock. At first I was given the list of questions for interrogation issued by the headquarters, but then I learned the questions by heart and could manage myself. I wrote down the answers and sent my notes to the division headquarters. Then the prisoner was taken to the division headquarters to be interrogated by the chief of intelligence through an interpreter. The chief could also check how true the answers were by my notes.

Once we captured a German soldier. I started interrogating him and he said that Stalin and Hitler were drinking vodka together while we were shooting at each other on their order. Our people got very angry at him and started shouting, 'Hitler kaput!' The German enjoyed repeating with us: 'Hitler kaput!' It also happened that there were Russian prisoners-of-war in German transports. They served in the rear German units as drivers or loaders. We were merciless with them: 'You

work for the Germans!' and we shot them. Even Germans were in an advantageous situation compared to those Russians. They had a hope to survive if they told the truth during interrogation, while the Russians working for Germans didn't even have a chance to be sent to the tribunal. They were shot on the spot. They knew they could count on no mercy and fired back desperately, knowing that however miserable, this was their only chance to survive. I remember that once we captured a transport and the drivers were Russian. Two started firing back and one raised his hands, saying, 'Comrades, I'm not here by my own will...' Our platoon commander shot him. Only after the war did I understand that not all of them were traitors.

Things happened and Germans often captured wounded people who couldn't shoot themselves and took them to concentration camps where the prisoners starved and were kept outside even in winter. The only chance for prisoners to survive was to start working for the Germans. If it hadn't been for our cruelty and intolerance, many of them would have joined us and fought against the Germans, but we never failed to remind them that if a person worked for the Germans he was a traitor. This attitude was continuously developed and maintained. However, there were other incidents.

Once, our intelligence unit came to a village. There were partisans in the village. They told us that there was a dragoon unit consisting of Soviet prisoners-of-war under the command of a German officer in the nearby village. We stayed overnight in this village and at night this dragoon unit attacked the village. They were not aware that the Soviet regular army was already in the village. We started firing at them. There were two artillery soldiers with us. They gave command to their unit to shoot at the village. The German dragoon unit understood that they were fired at by a Soviet regular army unit and retreated. We captured three prisoners. This was the first time, when we captured prisoners from a punitive dragoon unit who were former Soviet people.

We took them to our company commanding officer. When he heard who they were, he grabbed a log and started hitting one of them. Someone mentioned that they should probably be taken to the division headquarters, but this prisoner was already dead. Two other prisoners were taken to the division headquarters. The headquarters issued an order saying that three dragoon troopers had been sentenced to death and that the sentence had been executed. The remaining dragoon unit escaped from the village where they were deployed leaving everything behind. We found a record player with records of popular Soviet songs and funny stories by clowns. These trophies were a great success. We enjoyed listening to these old records after the fight...

We often bumped into partisan units in the German rear. Many of them were formed from former regular units that happened to be encircled, but managed to form partisan units and continue fighting in the woods. Such units caused significant damage to German troops. There were also units formed from local residents. Some units fought against Germans as best they could, but there were others that stayed in the villages only concerned about getting food and drinks, waiting till the regular army had chased away the German troops. Once we came across a partisan unit, when they were having a party eating and drinking. They had happened to attack a German air field and seized food and schnapps from there. A Czech soldier serving in the German army had informed them about this air field. He met a local girl and she arranged for him to contact this partisan unit. He helped them to arrange this attack and then joined the partisan unit. He was sitting there, but he didn't eat or drink. I started talking to him. He came from a rather wealthy family. They lived in Germany. His father was a merchant. The Czech had studied at university. When the war began, he

was regimented to the army. After the war the Pravda newspaper published an article about this Czech. I read in this article that he perished at the very end of the war.

There were also bandit units. We happened to disarm one of them. Our intelligence commanding officer went to a meeting with the girls living in a village. They were our messengers and informed us about the relocation of German units. There was a partisan unit deployed near the village. This unit had captured the girls and tortured them, I don't know why. When our company senior lieutenant, went to meet with the girls, the partisans captured him and locked him in a shed. He managed to escape. Our company commanding officer, Komsomol leader and I were in an earth hut, when this senior lieutenant ran in shouting: 'Alarm the company!' The company consisting of three squads was given an alarm and headed to the partisan unit. When we arrived there we demanded for the unit commanding officer to make his appearance. We tied him up and sent him to the army headquarters. The other members of the partisan unit were disarmed and taken into the guard house. From there they were sent to the headquarters. I don't know what happened to them. Many things happened. The films and memoirs show only heroic deeds, but there was a lot of mess and nonsense during the war, just like in everyday life...

When I watch movies about the war, the soldiers in them attack shouting: 'For Stalin!' I don't remember that this happened at the front line, though I happened to go in attack only once, when we were to break through an encirclement. However, I watched the others going in attacks. Nobody shouted anything like this. They pronounced a few curse words to cheer up, shouted 'Hurrah' and went forward. I was deputy political officer of a company and can state that there was strong political propaganda and there was much nonsense in it.

In our peaceful life we accepted written socialist commitments promising to accomplish something by each Soviet holiday, for example, to complete a half-year plan [of the work] by 1st May. All of a sudden somebody had the following idea during the war: each soldier was to write a commitment regarding how many Germans he obligated himself to kill by Soviet Army Day [24](#). I was also a Komsomol leader of the company and was to gather these socialist commitments from the soldiers. They were to sign them. It was an ordeal for me: 'You have to write a commitment about how many Germans you obligate yourself to kill by the holiday', 'But, comrade deputy political officer, what if I am killed tomorrow?' 'You write down how many you will kill', 'all right, five', 'Are you out of your mind? You are a machine gunner!' You didn't know whether to laugh or cry... I gathered the papers and sent them to the political department of the division. A few days later I took part in the Komsomol conference where the chief of the political department of the division presented a report. He said that our division obliges itself to kill this and that number of Germans by Red Army Day. This obligation became mandatory for us. Each Komsomol leader was to write down how many Germans he had already killed. Of course, it was impossible to give accurate numbers and we made guesses. Later, after the Stalingrad Battle [25](#), when Marshal Zhukov [26](#) became commander, he said this was nonsense and there could be no socialist obligations in the army. He put an end to this stupidity.

I don't know how gasoline was supplied to us. Our driver was to take care of gasoline for the vehicle. As for food supplies, the situation was miserable. We were mainly outside in 1941-42, particularly in winter. The winter was cold, the temperature dropped down to about 30°?. When we went in attacks we often came across burning houses that the Germans had set on fire. We sat around the fire, wearing our 'valenki' [warm Russian felt boots], and fur jackets under our uniform

coats. The bread was delivered frozen. It was like ice. We sawed the loaves and each got a piece. We put our pieces on fire till they were defrosted on the edges, nibbled on them and then put them back on the fire to defreeze the rest. However, intelligence units were in a better situation than the rest of the army.

Once we attacked a transport, captured a German prisoner and seized bread, chocolate and tinned food. The adjutant of General Berezin, our division commander, came in asking us to give him a loaf of bread for the commander and maybe something else. Commanding officers also suffered from lack of food. We also made use of dead horses that were numerous on battlefields. We chose the least damaged, sewed off pieces and boiled them. It was good when we had salt. However, smokers were in the worst position. The mahorka tobacco deliveries were rare and smokers suffered terribly from lack of tobacco. They powdered tree rind and dried leaves. They looked forward to delivery dates.

We had regular supplies of soap and toothpaste. In summer we could wash ourselves in rivers or with water from wells. In winter we used water from wells when we stayed in villages, or snow, when we were in the fields or in the woods. We rarely got a chance to sleep in a house or an earth hut: we mostly stayed in the fields. We didn't change our clothes for months, only dried our valenki boots by the fire. The real disaster was when we got lice. When we went in attacks German troops didn't even get a chance to set houses on fire before they retreated. We were exhausted and fell asleep in village houses.

This was when all the lice in those huts attacked us. It's hard to recall this! Once before going to sleep in a hut I took off my undershirt and left it outside to freeze out the lice. I looked at it in the morning: the undershirt was green and there were white spots on it. They were the frozen lice. I was told that they would come to life again the moment I put the shirt on. I threw it into the stove and had no undershirt till I got a new one. We were scratching ourselves without even noticing it. Once, our division commanding officer came by. We were sitting by the fire and he joined us. We looked at him: the general also scratched himself! When the offensive began, we went to the sauna in the villages every day. We also heated our uniforms to eliminate lice. Fortunately, we avoided diseases and an epidemic of typhus. People in evacuation told us they had lice that spread an epidemic, and they fell ill and died from diseases, but we managed all right.

The only thing we had plenty of was vodka. In winter we received 100 grams each and a piece of pork fat to warm ourselves every day. Actually, we had even more than this ration. Our master sergeant submitted the number of staff before battles and received the ordered quantities of vodka. He always had reserves of vodka due to casualties.

There were SMERSH [27](#) representatives in each regiment. However, there was none in our intelligence unit. Fortunately, I never dealt with any. Of course, not all of them captured German spies. They mainly watched the moods in units and had their informers, who reported to them on those who expressed their discontent. Somebody reported that our telephone operator was listening to German radio stations at night. This radio operator was sent to the tribunal. This happened in 1941, before penal battalions were formed in late 1942. The radio operator was sentenced to five years and had to serve his sentence at the front line. He was sent back to our regiment and strictly ordered to never listen to German radio stations again.

There were intervals between battles at the front line. There were no women at the front. There were some in medical battalions, but our medical battalion was at quite a distance from our location. During intervals we were busy fixing our uniforms or valenki boots. We also talked discussing our pre-war life and making plans for the future. Once we chased Germans out of a village. There were no residents left in the village. The Germans had deported them to Germany. I came into a house and saw books on shelves: these were works by Leonid Andreyev, an old pre-Revolutionary edition in beautiful solid leather binding. [Editor's note: Andreyev, Leonid Nikolayevich (1871-1919): Russian author, prose-writer and playwright; one of the most outstanding Russian writers of the early 20th century, he developed expressionist poetry in his plays.] It was warm in the house and there was a kerosene lamp on and I took to reading right away. I even forgot I was hungry. I hadn't had a book in my hands for a long time. This was the first time I read Andreyev. This was an unforgettable feeling: the war was on, another battle was just over, the others were sleeping on the floor, and I was reading... Later I re-read Andreyev's books, but they made the strongest impression on me during the interval between battles.

I cannot remember the first German I killed. This was not quite like murdering a person: somebody was running, I fired my gun and never saw him again. Then another one: you leveled your gun and pulled the trigger... I was an excellent shooter and participated in tournaments after the war. During battles I felt no more emotions than I did when hitting a target in peaceful times. There was a scary thing: when deserters or those who undertook mutilation intentionally to avoid going to the front line were executed in front of the alignment. Before penal battalions were established the only punishment was execution before the line. The regiment was ordered to line up, then the sentence was read and the order 'Fire!' issued. A squad of soldiers fired at their former comrade. This happened rarely, but these are still shattering memories.

When penal battalions were established, deserters were sent there, though those who undertook mutilation were still executed. When a person shot himself in his leg or arm, he could serve in the army no longer, and these people weren't sent to medical battalions. For other violations military men were sent to penal battalions. There were few survivors in those battalions. Civilian criminals were also sent to penal battalions. After the war I met the husband of my future wife's friend; he was in a penal battalion. He worked at a military plant in Moscow and wasn't subject to military service. He started some dealings with bread cards. The militia captured him, and after a prompt trial he was sent to a penal battalion. He was lucky: he was slightly wounded and sent to a common military unit afterward. People stayed in penal battalions till they were killed or wounded. There was a saying: 'Till the first blood'. Germans knew that when a penal battalion appeared on the scene there was a breakthrough planned in this area. Penal battalions were sent through mine fields. They were actually sentenced to death. Those who were wounded had a chance to survive. The rest of them died.

In 1941 I was awarded my first Order of the Red Star [28](#), and in 1942 I received the second one. These are all my military awards. I was also awarded an Order of the Great Patriotic War [29](#), 1st Class, in 1985, before the 40th anniversary of the victory over Germany.

In late April 1942, on the eve of 1st May, I was wounded. At first it seemed it was nothing serious: a splinter hit me in my jaw. Our company doctor pulled it out with his pincers and applied plaster on the wound. Next day we went on survey. A battalion had been encircled. We were to get through to them and take them out of the encirclement. The snow had melted and the mud was impassable. I

had to stay in a swamp for a few hours. When we returned, my wound began to ache and I had a fever. Then I developed a phlegmon and osteomyelitis. In hospital I was told that there was another splinter left in my wound. Basically, I can bear pain, but this time it was unbearable. I was sent to a medical battalion. Before going to hospital my comrades convinced me to drink a glass of vodka to suppress the pain. I usually got drunk from 100 grams of vodka, but this time I drank a glass and nothing happened. The pain was splitting my head. I drank another glass, but the effect was the same.

From the very start of the war I corresponded with Mama and Aunt Revekka. Mama finished a course of medical nurses and obtained an assignment to our division medical battalion. In the medical battalion where my mother served, they cleaned my wound and sent me over to the army hospital in the small town of Torzhok. I was to stay there 60 days according to procedures. If treatment demanded a longer period, doctors wrote 'over 60 days' on medical records and sent such patients to hospitals in the rear. I was sent to Moscow. A front line evacuation hospital was deployed in Burdenko hospital. I spent about half a year there. Mama demobilized and moved to Moscow. She was a lieutenant and worked in a military office till the end of the war. Mama and Aunt Revekka often visited me in hospital.

In 1942 I became a candidate to the Party. Then I was wounded, stayed in hospitals and my documents were lost. I joined the Party only in 1944. So according to my documents I was a member since 1944, while actually my membership started in 1942. Joining the Party was no question for me. My parents were communists so how could I help joining the party? This was like a religion to me. I believed this all like religious people believe in their religious dogmas without giving it a thought or doubting them.

When I was on my way to recovery, representatives of military schools began to come to our hospital inviting people to enter schools. They were looking for those who had secondary education. I was offered to go to an infantry school, but I didn't quite want to go there. Then I got an offer from a medical military academy. I didn't want to become a doctor whatsoever after all I had seen in hospitals. I thought that since I had been thinking of becoming an engineer before the war, a technical school was the closest to this decision. I entered the faculty of artillery mechanics of the Leningrad school evacuated to Izhevsk. I obtained a pass and tickets and took a train to Izhevsk. I studied for nine months and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Upon graduation I became a military shipment forwarder. I escorted shipments with shells and weaponry loaded on rear storage facilities and sent to the front.

There was also a crew of soldiers escorting the shipment to unload the carriages in case of bombardments to prevent them from exploding. The explosion might have been caused by a direct hit of a bomb or by detonation. These trains passed stations without any delay. If a station was jammed, we had to talk to the commandant who arranged for the train to pass. In this way the shipments were delivered to army storage facilities where they were unloaded, and my crew and I went back. Of course, it was hard during bombardments, when we had to separate the carriages to prevent them from explosion. Then we had to watch that all carriages were taken back to their place and that none of them was missing.

I heard that the war was over when we arrived at the storage in Yaroslavl. The town rejoiced. There were orchestras playing, people dancing and greeting each other. Of course, there was also

sadness in this joy, when people recalled those who wouldn't come back home, but everybody had faith in the future. Peaceful life began.

- **Post-war**

Mama lived in our two rooms in the shared apartment. Her younger sister Revekka also lived there, though she had a room in another shared apartment. When I returned, Mama quit her job and received a good pension as an old communist. In 1949 we moved to an apartment building on Arbat Street where old communists lived. At first, if an old communist died, his family was forced to leave the apartment. After the war this procedure was cancelled, but tenants were still afraid of being forced to move out. Mama managed to exchange this apartment that belonged to the widow of an old communist. We moved into her separate two-bedroom apartment. A few years later we exchanged this apartment and Revekka's room for the apartment where I live now.

I had to decide what to do: demobilize and go back to college? I decided to enter the Moscow Artillery Academy. I submitted my application in 1946. There were two-stage entrance exams: at first applicants had to take exams in the military regiment, and then the winners had to take exams in the academy. There was a big competition: five to seven applicants per admission. I passed my exams successfully and was admitted to the first year of the Faculty of Ammunition. I faced no prejudiced attitudes. I think national identity didn't matter at the time. Knowledge was what mattered. There were two groups of 25 students in our faculty. Two were Jews. I was one and the second was another war veteran. His name was Abram, but I don't remember his surname. There were many Jewish applicants, but only two of us were admitted. However, I think they just failed at the entrance exams. I faced no anti-Semitism during my studies at the academy, though it emerged in everyday life after the war. On my way from Yaroslavl to Moscow, in an overcrowded carriage, I heard officers talking to one another: 'Those Jews, zhydy...' In Moscow I also happened to hear things like this, though never addressed to me. Anti-Semitism became a common thing in everyday life and wasn't punished. However, it occurred among common people, not among the intelligentsia at the academy.

In 1948 trials against cosmopolitans [see campaign against 'cosmopolitans'] [30](#), scientists and people in the arts, began. All or almost all of them were Jews. However, I never associated any of these incidents with myself. The others in the academy also associated these processes with people in literature, artists. They had nothing to do with engineers though, and we didn't even discuss this subject.

In 1950 I finished the Academy in the rank of captain. I got a job assignment to a company manufacturing plane shells. I worked as junior military representative. All military representatives at enterprises developing weapons were responsible for quality assurance of the weaponry to be added to the arsenals. Military representatives at manufacturing enterprises were to ensure the quality of manufactured products and their compliance with technical requirements. In design companies military representatives had to review designs and drawings and approve the introduction of new weapons into manufacture. I worked in this office for a few months before I was transferred to Academician Korolyov's [31](#) company where I was promoted to the position of military representative.

This company developed and manufactured missiles. When I joined the company, it was in the process of developing a 600-km-range missile. Later they developed and manufactured a 1,200-km-range missile. And these missile developments are still in use. I was appointed group supervisor in the Korolyov design office. My group was to review all estimations issued by the design office employees: ballistic estimations, safety estimations, load estimates, aerodynamics. My group included specialists in aerodynamics and safety, and I was a specialist in ballistics. The final approval of estimates and drawings required signatures of all military representatives and mine. Most of the design office employees were civilian candidates and doctors of science [see Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees] [32](#). The overall process of development of these missiles started with the development of design documentation and manufacture of missiles and was completed at the test ground.

We used two test grounds: the well-known Baykonur [33](#) ground and another one in Zagorsk. Military representatives were involved in the process on all stages. Each stage required their statement of correctness and compliance with requirements. I was to issue my statement on the stage of design. Of course, it was a great responsibility. I happened to find errors in estimations. In this case I was to write an executive note to the management, but I never did this. I just went to see the developers and said: 'How come, guys...?' and they corrected their errors. The military representatives inspecting the quality of finished products had a hard time. For example, during a test they could find out that a valve was fixed in the wrong way. Of course, it was a failure at manufacture, but where was the military representative at the time? During Stalin's regime this was interpreted as a sabotage act and people were taken to the tribunal from where they only had two ways: to the Gulag or the death sentence.

After the Twentieth Party Congress [34](#) things became more humane. There was a reprimand issued, a note made in the employment record book regarding poor performance. This was hard, but not lethal. In the late 1950s a colonel came to work with us as a military representative. He happened to have worked in our office before I came to work here. He missed something in the course of acceptance and was sent to the Gulag. He was released after the Twentieth Party Congress, rehabilitated [see Rehabilitation [in the Soviet Union] [35](#) and resumed his former position. He worked in the office till he retired.

• **Married life**

I got married in 1952. I knew my future wife Zoria Petrunicheva since childhood. Her parents were old communists and lived in Kiev before the Revolution of 1917. They worked in a party unit together. They got married at approximately the same time as my parents did. Zoria's mother, Yelizaveta Privarovskaya, was a Jew and her father, Nikolay Petrunichev, was Russian. Later both families moved to Moscow and continued to be friends. I knew Zoria almost since her birth. She was born in Moscow in 1926. We often saw each other on holidays, at family gatherings and birthdays. There was an age difference of seven years between us and it was significant before the war. Zoria's younger brother Vladimir was born in 1933.

When I returned home after the war Zoria was a student at the Department of History of Moscow University. When I studied at the academy, Zoria's mother bought a tour to the Riga seashore for Zoria, her younger brother, my cousin Fira, my aunt Maria's daughter, who also lived in Moscow and studied at university, and me. That summer Zoria and I realized that we loved each other.

After finishing her studies Zoria went to work at the Institute of Oriental Studies. We got married in 1952. We didn't have a Jewish wedding. Our parents and I were members of the Party. Neither my wife nor I were religious. We registered our marriage in a registry office and in the evening our parents arranged a wedding dinner for us. Our relatives and friends attended it. Zoria moved in with us. Regretfully, Mama didn't live long enough to see her grandchildren. She died in 1952, a few months after our wedding. She was buried in the common cemetery and there was a common funeral.

In January 1953 the 'Doctors' Plot' [36](#) began. I felt no change of attitude towards me or other Jewish employees in our bureau, but these processes instigated another burst of anti-Semitism among people. At first it was directed at Jewish doctors, but then it spread on all others. Of course, I didn't believe what the mass media wrote about doctors poisoning people. Though I was a devoted communist, I understood deep in my heart that this couldn't be true and that somebody was instigating this agitation to play his own game. However, it wasn't possible to discuss this subject with anybody: nobody could be sure that his companion didn't work for the NKVD [37](#) as a secret agent.

I remember Stalin's death in March 1953 very well. Everybody around me and I grieved after him. We were religious people. Our religion was Communism and Stalin was our God. We believed in his infallibility and justice. During the period of persecutions of doctors I was sure that this happened without his awareness, otherwise he would have stopped this disgrace. Even my mother and her friends whispered about the illegal proceedings in the country, arrests of their friends and acquaintances adding with confidence, 'But Stalin doesn't know, to be sure.'

My wife and I went to Stalin's funeral. People were gathering on Sadovoye Koltso. We joined the column that slowly started moving. It stopped and then moved on again. There were people crowding around us. We moved for three or four hours, when we heard rumors that nobody would let us come to the Column Hall and that our procession was moving in a circle. We looked around and saw that the Column Hall was in a different direction. Zoria and I got out of the crowd and went home.

Khrushchev [38](#) spoke about the cult of Stalin and his crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress. Despite my fanatical devotion to the Party I believed what he said. The first thing I did was taking Stalin's portrait off the wall. My God happened to be a murderer and a criminal. Though my attitude to Stalin changed radically, it didn't affect my attitude to the Party. However, I had an ambiguous feeling: sort of that all ideas of communism remained intact and everything was right. Stalin could be wrong, but not the Party. The CPSU was the leading and governing party in the USSR throughout the years of the Soviet regime. I took an active part in party activities. I was a propagandist at work. Like a Jewish preacher propagated the God's Law, I propagated our Lenin/Stalin manifesto.

I have many letters of appreciation and gratitude from the district party committee. I was supervisor of a political study group. The group had gatherings once a month after work in the evening and I conducted the study. There were approved plans and subjects of classes. We also studied the history of the Great Patriotic War. I suggested this subject at the district party committee, and to adjust it to the political classes we entitled it 'The Role of the Party in the History of the War'. We had classes at the Museum of the Soviet Army. We listened to lectures and brought books and made reports at these classes. They were interesting. I always tried to make classes

interesting for the attendants.

I didn't face any everyday anti-Semitism, but the state anti-Semitism affected me a lot. It started at the end of the war and lasted until perestroika [39](#) began. I worked as a junior military representative, military representative and senior military representative. Every now and then military representatives were employed by the central office, chief artillery department or chief missile department where they became state officials. They were transferred in the rank of captains or majors. This was a perspective transfer. They were promptly promoted to colonels and generals working in chief headquarters. I couldn't count on such a promotion. There was a direction to employ no Jews at the central office of the ministry. I was aware of this and worked quietly at the plant.

I was valued as a specialist in estimations. There were few such specialists. It was one thing to check parts at a shop, but a totally different responsibility to check ballistic estimations. Once, an interesting thing happened. The commander of the rocket forces, Nedelin, was replaced by General Moskalenko. One of my former colleagues, who went to work at headquarters, asked me whether I wanted to go to work there. I replied, 'Don't you know the procedure?' and he said that Moskalenko had directed them to employ smart people and form a team regardless of nationality. So I got the opportunity to work at the central structure and get a chance for prompt promotion. This was an attractive offer, but I thought, 'Moskalenko is there today and who will come tomorrow?' And I refused. As it happened, I was right. Moskalenko was replaced by Krylov who forced all Jewish employees out.

I worked safely at the plant for 50 years. I retired in the rank of an engineer lieutenant colonel. I believe I made my contribution to the development of our rocket equipment. I identified errors and made suggestions. I also have inventions and patent certificates related to rocket equipment. I was awarded a Gagarin [40](#) Medal. [Editor's note: in 1968 the International Aviation Federation established the Gagarin Medal awarded to those who made significant contributions to aviation and cosmonautics]. In 1999, I was awarded a very rare award: a badge of honor, 'Veteran of cosmos' [Cosmos Award: introduced to commemorate the first manned space flight by Yuri Gagarin.] There are just a few awardees in the USSR.

Upon my retirement from the army I went to work at the scientific research institute of optical and physical researches. I was a senior engineer there and also received my military pension. I was also a propagandist at the research institute and tried to make my classes interesting. In 1987, when perestroika began it caused unemployment and mass reduction of staff, affecting older people. I retired.

• **My children**

Zoria and I have two children: Nina, born in 1956, and Nikolay, born in 1963. They grew up like all other Soviet children. They were pioneers and Komsomol members. I spent as much time as I could with them. In summer we went to the seashore or to the mountains, at weekends we went for walks, to the cinema or theater. We had family dinners in the evening where we discussed what had happened during the day, shared our thoughts and supported each other. We were very close.

We celebrated Soviet holidays at home: 1st May and 7th November [October Revolution Day] [41](#), Soviet Army Day and New Year's Eve. Of course, Victory Day [42](#), 9th May was the most important holiday. On this day we went to the monument to the Unknown Soldier where we laid flowers. In the evening we had a gathering of veterans where we shared memories and sang wartime songs.

Zoria and I wanted to make our children's life easier and registered them as Russians in their passports, though they had my surname. But they faced anti-Semitism anyway. After finishing school Nina entered the French Faculty of the College of Foreign Languages. She had all excellent marks and took part in public activities: this was mandatory at the time. When she was a 3rd or 4th-year student, fifteen of her fellow students were sent to France on training. Nina was also on the list initially, but during the second round of selection where she submitted application forms stating her parents' nationality, she was removed from the list. She got no explanation, but did she need any? She traveled to France twenty years later, after perestroika and the breakup of the USSR [in 1991]. Nina was one of the best students. Upon graduation she went to work as a translator at the state publishing house '???k?' [Science]. After perestroika Nina started working for a number of publishing houses. She works at a publishing house publishing books on economics now. My daughter isn't really fond of this work, but in her free time she also translates fiction, which is more interesting for her.

Nikolay was also fond of humanitarian sciences, but he couldn't even dream of entering Moscow University: it required the parents' nationality in the application forms. Like many boys with the 'wrong' Item 5 [43](#) in application forms, he entered the Faculty of Russian Philology of the Moscow Teachers' Training College where guys were always appreciated. The college management had hopes that more men would come to work at school. Some of Nikolay's friends went to work at school after finishing the college, but hardly any of them stayed there. Teachers' salaries are low and it was impossible to support a family with it. Nikolay's friend, a born teacher, quit his job at the last moment and went to work as a guard for an oligarch. After finishing college Nikolay went to work as an editor in a publishing house. He works for a number of publishing houses now. He reviews manuscripts and gives his commercial assessment of books.

In the 1970s, when mass departures of Jews to Israel began, I didn't share the common and official view that those people were traitors. I understood those people who were often driven to despair by anti-Semitism and I understood what they were driven by. However, I didn't consider departure. I grew up here, participated in the war and wanted to live here, and my family was of the same opinion.

In the late 1980s the General Secretary of the CPSU, Mikhail Gorbachev [44](#) introduced the new policy of the Party: perestroika. This was freedom for us that Soviet citizens hadn't seen throughout the period of the Soviet regime: freedom of travel and freedom of press. Before this period we listened to Radio Free Europe [45](#) to hear the news, but now we were overwhelmed by the quantities of information avalanching down on us. Newspapers and magazines published articles that we would have never imagined to appear. Books formerly forbidden in the USSR were published; movies that had been kept in closed archives for many years were shown. It became possible to correspond and visit people abroad and invite friends and relatives.

Before perestroika we lived behind the Iron Curtain [46](#). Traveling abroad required so many documents and recommendations that it's scary even to recall this. My wife was a scientific

employee of the Institute of Oriental Studies. She specialized in the culture of India. Once, her Indian colleagues invited her to a congress in India. The trip was for a week, but she spent a lot more time to collect all certificates. Zoria had to go to the district party committee where they approved her candidacy. At first I was enthusiastic about perestroika, but then everything went differently than expected. Unemployment, which actually never existed in the USSR, rose, prices started to go up and it became more and more difficult to make a living on existing salaries. It all ended with the breakup of the USSR. I still don't think this was worth doing. The states that emerged from the ruins of the USSR still exist in poverty and discords. I think there are no winners here.

Many Jewish communities appeared in Russia after the breakup of the USSR. I take part in the work of the Jewish Association of Veterans of the War headed by Hero of the Soviet Union [47](#) Moisey Marianovskiy. I take part in all events, particularly on Victory Day. People have become religious and this surprises me. What can religion give us? I think it is for humanitarians while representatives of exact sciences are atheists. My parents were communists and raised me as an atheist. I cannot believe, for example, that a dead person can rise from the dead. The Bible and the Torah are legends which are over 2,000 years old. Would anything in my life change for the better if I put on a yarmulka, started reading the Bible and murmured prayers? I prefer common human values: family, love, honesty and devotion. In my opinion, this is what can change the world.

- **Glossary**

1 Jewish Pale of Settlement

Certain provinces in the Russian Empire were designated for permanent Jewish residence and the Jewish population was only allowed to live in these areas. The Pale was first established by a decree by Catherine II in 1791. The regulation was in force until the Russian Revolution of 1917, although the limits of the Pale were modified several times. The Pale stretched from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and 94% of the total Jewish population of Russia, almost 5 million people, lived there. The overwhelming majority of the Jews lived in the towns and shtetls of the Pale. Certain privileged groups of Jews, such as certain merchants, university graduates and craftsmen working in certain branches, were granted to live outside the borders of the Pale of Settlement permanently.

2 Guild I

In tsarist Russia merchants belonged to Guild I, II or III. Merchants of Guild I were allowed to trade with foreign merchants, while the others were allowed to trade only within Russia.

3 Podol

The lower section of Kiev. It has always been viewed as the Jewish region of Kiev. In tsarist Russia Jews were only allowed to live in Podol, which was the poorest part of the city. Before World War II 90% of the Jews of Kiev lived there.

4 Keep in touch with relatives abroad

The authorities could arrest an individual corresponding with his/her relatives abroad and charge him/her with espionage, send them to concentration camp or even sentence them to death.

5 Gulag

The Soviet system of forced labor camps in the remote regions of Siberia and the Far North, which was first established in 1919. However, it was not until the early 1930s that there was a significant number of inmates in the camps. By 1934 the Gulag, or the Main Directorate for Corrective Labor Camps, then under the Cheka's successor organization the NKVD, had several million inmates. The prisoners included murderers, thieves, and other common criminals, along with political and religious dissenters. The Gulag camps made significant contributions to the Soviet economy during the rule of Stalin. Conditions in the camps were extremely harsh. After Stalin died in 1953, the population of the camps was reduced significantly, and conditions for the inmates improved somewhat.

6 Great Patriotic War

On 22nd June 1941 at 5 o'clock in the morning Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union without declaring war. This was the beginning of the so-called Great Patriotic War. The German blitzkrieg, known as Operation Barbarossa, nearly succeeded in breaking the Soviet Union in the months that followed. Caught unprepared, the Soviet forces lost whole armies and vast quantities of equipment to the German onslaught in the first weeks of the war. By November 1941 the German army had seized the Ukrainian Republic, besieged Leningrad, the Soviet Union's second largest city, and threatened Moscow itself. The war ended for the Soviet Union on 9th May 1945.

7 Kaganovich, Lazar (1893-1991)

Soviet Communist leader. A Jewish shoemaker and labor organizer, he joined the Communist Party in 1911. He rose quickly through the party ranks and by 1930 he had become Moscow party secretary-general and a member of the Politburo. He was an influential proponent of forced collectivization and played a role in the purges of 1936-38. He was known for his ruthless and merciless personality. He became commissar for transportation (1935) and after the purges was responsible for heavy industrial policy in the Soviet Union. In 1957, he joined in an unsuccessful attempt to oust Khrushchev and was stripped of all his posts.

8 Common name

Russified or Russian first names used by Jews in everyday life and adopted in official documents. The Russification of first names was one of the manifestations of the assimilation of Russian Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In some cases only the spelling and pronunciation of Jewish names was russified (e.g. Isaac instead of Yitskhak; Boris instead of Borukh), while in other cases traditional Jewish names were replaced by similarly sounding Russian names (e.g. Eugenia instead of Ghita; Yury instead of Yuda). When state anti-Semitism intensified in the USSR at the end of the 1940s, most Jewish parents stopped giving their children traditional Jewish names to avoid discrimination.

9 Russian Revolution of 1917

Revolution in which the tsarist regime was overthrown in the Russian Empire and, under Lenin, was replaced by the Bolshevik rule. The two phases of the Revolution were: February Revolution, which came about due to food and fuel shortages during World War I, and during which the tsar abdicated and a provisional government took over. The second phase took place in the form of a coup led by Lenin in October/November (October Revolution) and saw the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks.

10 Civil War (1918-1920)

The Civil War between the Reds (the Bolsheviks) and the Whites (the anti-Bolsheviks), which broke out in early 1918, ravaged Russia until 1920. The Whites represented all shades of anti-communist groups - Russian army units from World War I, led by anti-Bolshevik officers, by anti-Bolshevik volunteers and some Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. Several of their leaders favored setting up a military dictatorship, but few were outspoken tsarists. Atrocities were committed throughout the Civil War by both sides. The Civil War ended with Bolshevik military victory, thanks to the lack of cooperation among the various White commanders and to the reorganization of the Red forces after Trotsky became commissar for war. It was won, however, only at the price of immense sacrifice; by 1920 Russia was ruined and devastated. In 1920 industrial production was reduced to 14% and agriculture to 50% as compared to 1913.

11 Communal apartment

The Soviet power wanted to improve housing conditions by requisitioning 'excess' living space of wealthy families after the Revolution of 1917. Apartments were shared by several families with each family occupying one room and sharing the kitchen, toilet and bathroom with other tenants. Because of the chronic shortage of dwelling space in towns communal or shared apartments continued to exist for decades. Despite state programs for the construction of more houses and the liquidation of communal apartments, which began in the 1960s, shared apartments still exist today.

12 Great Terror (1934-1938)

During the Great Terror, or Great Purges, which included the notorious show trials of Stalin's former Bolshevik opponents in 1936-1938 and reached its peak in 1937 and 1938, millions of innocent Soviet citizens were sent off to labor camps or killed in prison. The major targets of the Great Terror were communists. Over half of the people who were arrested were members of the party at the time of their arrest. The armed forces, the Communist Party, and the government in general were purged of all allegedly dissident persons; the victims were generally sentenced to death or to long terms of hard labor. Much of the purge was carried out in secret, and only a few cases were tried in public 'show trials'. By the time the terror subsided in 1939, Stalin had managed to bring both the Party and the public to a state of complete submission to his rule. Soviet society was so atomized and the people so fearful of reprisals that mass arrests were no longer necessary. Stalin ruled as absolute dictator of the Soviet Union until his death in March 1953.

13 Young Octobrist

In Russian Oktyabrenok, or 'pre-pioneer', designates Soviet children of seven years or over preparing for entry into the pioneer organization.

14 All-Union pioneer organization

a communist organization for teenagers between 10 and 15 years old (cf: boy-/ girlscouts in the US). The organization aimed at educating the young generation in accordance with the communist ideals, preparing pioneers to become members of the Komsomol and later the Communist Party. In the Soviet Union, all teenagers were pioneers.

15 Bolsheviks

Members of the movement led by Lenin. The name 'Bolshevik' was coined in 1903 and denoted the group that emerged in elections to the key bodies in the Social Democratic Party (SDPRR) considering itself in the majority (Rus. bolshynstvo) within the party. It dubbed its opponents the minority (Rus. menshynstvo, the Mensheviks). Until 1906 the two groups formed one party. The Bolsheviks first gained popularity and support in society during the 1905-07 Revolution. During the February Revolution in 1917 the Bolsheviks were initially in the opposition to the Menshevik and SR ('Sotsialrevolyutsionery', Socialist Revolutionaries) delegates who controlled the Soviets (councils). When Lenin returned from emigration (16 April) they proclaimed his program of action (the April theses) and under the slogan 'All power to the Soviets' began to Bolshevikize the Soviets and prepare for a proletariat revolution. Agitation proceeded on a vast scale, especially in the army. The Bolsheviks set about creating their own armed forces, the Red Guard. Having overthrown the Provisional Government, they created a government with the support of the II Congress of Soviets (the October Revolution), to which they admitted some left-wing SRs in order to gain the support of the peasantry. In 1952 the Bolshevik party was renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

16 Enemy of the people

Soviet official term; euphemism used for real or assumed political opposition.

17 Yezhov, Nikolai Ivanovich (1895-1939)

Political activist, State Security General Commissar (1937), Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR from 1936-38. Arrested and shot in 1939. One of the leaders of mass arrests during Stalin's Great Purge between 1936-1939.

18 Beriya, L

P. (1899-1953): Communist politician, one of the main organizers of the mass arrests and political persecution between the 1930s and the early 1950s. Minister of Internal Affairs, 1938-1953. In 1953 he was expelled from the Communist Party and sentenced to death by the Supreme Court of the USSR.

19 Komsomol

Communist youth political organization created in 1918. The task of the Komsomol was to spread of the ideas of communism and involve the worker and peasant youth in building the Soviet Union. The Komsomol also aimed at giving a communist upbringing by involving the worker youth in the political struggle, supplemented by theoretical education. The Komsomol was more popular than the Communist Party because with its aim of education people could accept uninitiated young proletarians, whereas party members had to have at least a minimal political qualification.

20 Soviet-Finnish War (1939-40)

The Soviet Union attacked Finland on 30 November 1939 to seize the Karelian Isthmus. The Red Army was halted at the so-called Mannengeim line. The League of Nations expelled the USSR from its ranks. In February-March 1940 the Red Army broke through the Mannengeim line and reached Vyborg. In March 1940 a peace treaty was signed in Moscow, by which the Karelian Isthmus, and some other areas, became part of the Soviet Union.

21 Occupation of the Baltic Republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)

Although the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarded only Latvia and Estonia as parts of the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, according to a supplementary protocol (signed in 28th September 1939) most of Lithuania was also transferred under the Soviets. The three states were forced to sign the 'Pact of Defense and Mutual Assistance' with the USSR allowing it to station troops in their territories. In June 1940 Moscow issued an ultimatum demanding the change of governments and the occupation of the Baltic Republics. The three states were incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republics.

22 Voroshylov, Kliment Yefremovich (1881-1969)

Soviet military leader and public official. He was an active revolutionary before the Revolution of 1917 and an outstanding Red Army commander in the Russian Civil War. As commissar for military and naval affairs, later defense, Voroshilov helped reorganize the Red Army. He was a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party from 1926 and a member of the Supreme Soviet from 1937. He was dropped from the Central Committee in 1961 but reelected to it in 1966.

23 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union, which became known under the name of Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Engaged in a border war with Japan in the Far East and fearing the German advance in the west, the Soviet government began secret negotiations for a non-aggression pact with Germany in 1939. In August 1939 it suddenly announced the conclusion of a Soviet-German agreement of friendship and non-aggression. The Pact contained a secret clause providing for the partition of Poland and for Soviet and German spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

24 Soviet Army Day

The Russian imperial army and navy disintegrated after the outbreak of the Revolution of 1917, so the Council of the People's Commissars created the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army on a voluntary basis. The first units distinguished themselves against the Germans on February 23, 1918. This day became the 'Day of the Soviet Army' and is nowadays celebrated as 'Army Day'.

25 Stalingrad Battle

17th July 1942 - 2nd February 1943. The South- Western and Don Fronts stopped the advance of German armies in the vicinity of Stalingrad. On 19th and 20th November 1942 the Soviet troops undertook an offensive and encircled 22 German divisions (330,000 people) and eliminated them. On 31st January 1943 the remains of the 6th German army headed by General Field Marshal Paulus surrendered (91,000 people). The victory in the Stalingrad battle was of huge political, strategic and international significance.

26 Zhukov, Georgy (1896-1974)

Soviet Commander, Marshal of the Soviet Union, Hero of the Soviet Union. Georgy Zhukov was the most important Soviet military commander during World War II.

27 SMERSH

Russian abbreviation for 'Smert Shpionam' meaning Death to Spies. It was a counterintelligence department in the Soviet Union formed during World War II, to secure the rear of the active Red Army, on the front to arrest 'traitors, deserters, spies, and criminal elements'. The full name of the entity was USSR People's Commissariat of Defense Chief Counterintelligence Directorate 'SMERSH'. This name for the counterintelligence division of the Red Army was introduced on 19th April 1943, and worked as a separate entity until 1946. It was headed by Viktor Abakumov. At the same time a SMERSH directorate within the People's Commissariat of the Soviet Navy and a SMERSH department of the NKVD were created. The main opponent of SMERSH in its counterintelligence activity was Abwehr, the German military foreign information and counterintelligence department. SMERSH activities also included 'filtering' the soldiers recovered from captivity and the population of the gained territories. It was also used to punish within the NKVD itself; allowed to investigate, arrest and torture, force to sign fake confessions, put on a show trial, and either send to the camps or shoot people. SMERSH would also often be sent out to find and kill defectors, double agents, etc.; also used to maintain military discipline in the Red Army by means of barrier forces, that were supposed to shoot down the Soviet troops in the cases of retreat. SMERSH was also used to hunt down 'enemies of the people' outside Soviet territory.

28 Order of the Red Star

Established in 1930, it was awarded for achievements in the defense of the motherland, the promotion of military science and the development of military equipments, and for courage in battle. The Order of the Red Star has been awarded over 4,000,000 times.

29 Order of the Great Patriotic War

1st Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for skillful command of their units in action. 2nd Class: established 20th May 1942, awarded to officers and enlisted men of the armed forces and security troops and to partisans, irrespective of rank, for lesser personal valor in action.

30 Campaign against 'cosmopolitans'

The campaign against 'cosmopolitans', i.e. Jews, was initiated in articles in the central organs of the Communist Party in 1949. The campaign was directed primarily at the Jewish intelligentsia and it was the first public attack on Soviet Jews as Jews. 'Cosmopolitans' writers were accused of hating the Russian people, of supporting Zionism, etc. Many Yiddish writers as well as the leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested in November 1948 on charges that they maintained ties with Zionism and with American 'imperialism'. They were executed secretly in 1952. The anti-Semitic Doctors' Plot was launched in January 1953. A wave of anti-Semitism spread through the USSR. Jews were removed from their positions, and rumors of an imminent mass deportation of Jews to the eastern part of the USSR began to spread. Stalin's death in March 1953 put an end to the campaign against 'cosmopolitans'.

31 Korolyov, Sergey Pavlovich (1907-1966)

Soviet designer of guided missiles, rockets, and spacecraft. Korolyov was educated at the Odessa Building Trades School, the Kiev Polytechnic Institute, and the Moscow Higher Technical School. During World War II he was held under technical arrest but spent the years designing and testing liquid-fuel rocket boosters for military aircraft. Essentially apolitical, he did not join the Communist Party until after Stalin's death in 1953. He was the guiding genius behind the Soviet space-flight program until his death, and he was buried in the Kremlin wall on Red Square. In accordance with the Soviet government's space policies, his identity and role in his nation's space program were not publicly revealed until after his death.

32 Soviet/Russian doctorate degrees

Graduate school in the Soviet Union (aspirantura, or ordinatura for medical students), which usually took about 3 years and resulted in a dissertation. Students who passed were awarded a 'kandidat nauk' (lit. candidate of sciences) degree. If a person wanted to proceed with his or her research, the next step would be to apply for a doctorate degree (doktarontura). To be awarded a doctorate degree, the person had to be involved in the academia, publish consistently, and write an original dissertation. In the end he/she would be awarded a 'doctor nauk' (lit. doctor of sciences) degree.

33 Baykonur

Situated in Karaganda region in Kazakhstan, it was one of the biggest space vehicle launching sites in the USSR, which carried out an extensive program of space research. The first artificial satellite was launched from Bayknour; the first human astronaut, Yury Gagarin, as well as the first woman astronaut, Valentina Tereshkova, was also launched from Baykonur.

34 Twentieth Party Congress

At the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership.

35 Rehabilitation in the Soviet Union

Many people who had been arrested, disappeared or killed during the Stalinist era were rehabilitated after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, where Khrushchev publicly debunked the cult of Stalin and lifted the veil of secrecy from what had happened in the USSR during Stalin's leadership. It was only after the official rehabilitation that people learnt for the first time what had happened to their relatives as information on arrested people had not been disclosed before.

36 Doctors' Plot

The Doctors' Plot was an alleged conspiracy of a group of Moscow doctors to murder leading government and party officials. In January 1953, the Soviet press reported that nine doctors, six of whom were Jewish, had been arrested and confessed their guilt. As Stalin died in March 1953, the trial never took place. The official paper of the Party, the Pravda, later announced that the charges against the doctors were false and their confessions obtained by torture. This case was one of the worst anti-Semitic incidents during Stalin's reign. In his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 Khrushchev stated that Stalin wanted to use the Plot to purge the top Soviet leadership.

37 NKVD

People's Committee of Internal Affairs; it took over from the GPU, the state security agency, in 1934.

38 Khrushchev, Nikita (1894-1971)

Soviet communist leader. After Stalin's death in 1953, he became first secretary of the Central Committee, in effect the head of the Communist Party of the USSR. In 1956, during the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev took an unprecedented step and denounced Stalin and his methods. He was deposed as premier and party head in October 1964. In 1966 he was dropped from the Party's Central Committee.

39 Perestroika (Russian for restructuring)

Soviet economic and social policy of the late 1980s, associated with the name of Soviet politician Mikhail Gorbachev. The term designated the attempts to transform the stagnant, inefficient command economy of the Soviet Union into a decentralized, market-oriented economy. Industrial managers and local government and party officials were granted greater autonomy, and open elections were introduced in an attempt to democratize the Communist Party organization. By 1991, perestroika was declining and was soon eclipsed by the dissolution of the USSR.

40 Gagarin, Yuri Alexeyevich (1934-68)

Russian cosmonaut, pilot- cosmonaut of the USSR, colonel, Hero of the Soviet Union. On 12th April 1961 he became the first man flying into space on the Vostok spaceship. He was involved in training of spaceship crews. He perished during a test flight on a plane. Educational establishments, streets and squares in many towns are named after him. A crater on the back side of the Moon was also named after Gagarin.

41 October Revolution Day

October 25 (according to the old calendar), 1917 went down in history as victory day for the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia. This day is the most significant date in the history of the USSR. Today the anniversary is celebrated as 'Day of Accord and Reconciliation' on November 7.

42 Victory Day in Russia (9th May)

National holiday to commemorate the defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II and honor the Soviets who died in the war.

43 Item 5

This was the nationality factor, which was included on all job application forms, Jews, who were considered a separate nationality in the Soviet Union, were not favored in this respect from the end of World War WII until the late 1980s.

44 Gorbachev, Mikhail (1931-)

Soviet political leader. Gorbachev joined the Communist Party in 1952 and gradually moved up in the party hierarchy. In 1970 he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, where he remained until 1990. In 1980 he joined the politburo, and in 1985 he was appointed general secretary of the party. In 1986 he embarked on a comprehensive program of political, economic, and social liberalization under the slogans of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The government released political prisoners, allowed increased emigration, attacked corruption, and encouraged the critical reexamination of Soviet history. The Congress of People's Deputies, founded in 1989, voted to end the Communist Party's control over the government and elected Gorbachev executive president. Gorbachev dissolved the Communist Party and granted the Baltic states independence. Following the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991, he resigned as president. Since 1992, Gorbachev has headed international organizations.

45 Radio Free Europe

Radio station launched in 1949 at the instigation of the US government with headquarters in West Germany. The radio broadcast uncensored news and features, produced by Central and Eastern European émigrés, from Munich to countries of the Soviet block. The radio station was jammed behind the Iron Curtain, team members were constantly harassed and several people were killed in terrorist attacks by the KGB. Radio Free Europe played a role in supporting dissident groups, inner resistance and will of freedom in the Eastern and Central European communist countries and thus

it contributed to the downfall of the totalitarian regimes of the Soviet block. The headquarters of the radio have been in Prague since 1994.

46 Iron Curtain

A term popularized by Sir Winston Churchill in a speech in 1946. He used it to designate the Soviet Union's consolidation of its grip over Eastern Europe. The phrase denoted the separation of East and West during the Cold War, which placed the totalitarian states of the Soviet bloc behind an 'Iron Curtain'. The fall of the Iron Curtain corresponds to the period of perestroika in the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the democratization of Eastern Europe beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

47 Hero of the Soviet Union

Honorary title established on 16th April 1934 with the Gold Star medal instituted on 1st August 1939, by Decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. Awarded to both military and civilian personnel for personal or collective deeds of heroism rendered to the USSR or socialist society.